

# GOVERNMENTAL PATRONAGE OF ART.

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E. M. GALLAUDET.

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GOVERNMENTAL

PATRONAGE OF ART.

BY

EDWARD M. GALLAUDET.



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GOVERNMENTAL PATRONAGE OF ART.

*Errata.*

Page 8, last line but one, for Banduiel read Bandinel.

Page 9, line 5, for Gherardine read Gherardini.

Page 9, line 18, for Gagli read Gigli.

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## GOVERNMENTAL PATRONAGE OF ART.

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1. INTRODUCTION.—An act of Congress, approved February 14, 1873, sets forth as its object the enabling of “the people of the United States to participate in the advantages of the international exhibition of the products of agriculture, manufactures, and the fine arts, to be held at Vienna in the year 1873.”

The process by which this participation is to be accomplished would perhaps appear, at first thought, to be limited to the preparation of descriptive reports, more or less fully illustrated by means of photographs or drawings of articles presented for exhibition.

But, we take it, the work of the Commissioners is not restricted to the narrow bounds of mere description. A single visit to the Exhibition can hardly fail to give rise to suggestions of a general nature, the dissemination and discussion of which may serve to stimulate and advance particular interests.

Acting upon this presumption, we venture to present some considerations upon a subject which was forced upon our attention at very many points while threading the labyrinth of the *Welt-Ausstellung*.

As our eyes rested in succession upon the paintings, sculptures, bronzes, porcelains, and other works of art which embellished the Exhibition in almost bewildering numbers, we could not fail to notice that to very many of the more beautiful productions labels were attached, indicating that they had been already purchased, although but few weeks had passed since the opening of the Exhibition.

2. We observed the names of museums at St. Petersburg, Berlin, Vienna, Munich, Edinburgh, Nuremberg, Moscow, and other places as purchasers, besides those of individuals, who, it was well understood, were buying for the governments of the several countries of which they were citizens or rulers. In this lay the suggestion of a method of enabling the people of distant countries “to participate in the advantages of the international exhibition” quite different from that afforded by descriptive and even richly-illustrated reports.

Although the legislation of Congress may secure for the people of our country, through the medium of these reports, much that will be of value as regards the industries and so-called practical arts, it is evident that the department of the fine arts must remain practically a sealed book to all Americans who were not present at Vienna to see it for themselves.

3. While the governments of Europe have secured works of great

merit and value, as illustrating not only pure art, but art in its applications to industry, which, in their museums, freely open to the public, will enable their people to participate in this beautiful feature of the Exhibition, and serve as perpetual models of taste in the fine arts, the Government of the United States has, by its failure to provide the means for similar purchases, effectually cut off its people from any such participation in the advantages of this Exhibition.

The loss thus sustained cannot easily be estimated. But the lessons of neglected opportunities may be accepted by nations as well as by individuals; and while lost occasions may not be regained, those who have suffered by permitting them to pass unimproved may make themselves ready to profit by what the future shall present. And if, in a subject so important as the one we are considering, the losses entailed by the inadvertence of Congress can be made to appear so evident as to induce the adoption of wise measures on the part of the Government for the future, the error of the present may, in some degree at least, be compensated for.

Many persons to whom the subject of governmental patronage of art, as connected with the United States, may be presented, will doubtless object at once that the patronage of art forms no part of the duty of the Federal Government; and some will even go so far as to urge that the adoption of measures to this end would be in violation of the Constitution. Leaving all questions of constitutionality and legal ability to be settled by those whose duty it is to consider and dispose of them, our national legislators do not need to be reminded that the Constitution of the United States was made by and for the people, and not they by and for the Constitution. And if, as has already appeared in the progress of our national civilization, the provisions of organic law adopted a century, more or less, ago, may be profitably amended, it is by no means a conclusive argument against a proposed governmental policy or measure that it is unconstitutional.

We will not, however, even consume time and space in this paper by discussing the question, separately, whether the Federal Government ought to become the patron of art; in reference to which, however, we hold to a very decided affirmative.

We prefer to base our claim, to make the subject a practical one in connection with the Vienna Exhibition, on the fact that Congress has been *compelled* in the past to patronize art, and on the conclusion, which seems to us inevitable, that the Government will be *forced*, in the future, to continue and increase its patronage in this direction.

In the matter of erecting and maintaining public buildings, the subject of exterior and interior decorations, one of very great importance, presents itself to the Government almost every day, in one form or another. But even in relation to what may be termed pure art, scarcely a session of Congress passes without action. Some statue or picture

of considerable cost is purchased, and some native or foreign artist is thus patronized.

4. While we would not place ourselves in the position of condemning wholesale the action of the Government in the past, we may say, without giving just cause of offense to any, that the best artists of our own or of other countries have seldom been patronized, and that some works of very little merit have been paid for and set up in public places to form the taste of those who see no other productions of art. And we may even go so far as to assume that, had the Government adopted years ago some distinct and well-ordered policy in this matter, the amount of money already expended for works of art might have been made to produce results far more satisfactory than now appear.

5. From a well-considered article appearing in the New York Times during the month of May, 1873, in which the claims of a local art-museum were ably urged, we make the following pertinent extract :

"Appropriations of public money to advance the cause of art are not in accordance with the past policy of this country, and hardly yet consonant with public feeling on the subject. Nor does the cultivation of general taste in art appeal to the public in such a way as to command large private contributions from the wealthy and the generous. It does not address itself to the religious feeling of the community, or to the sectarian pride of any religious denomination; it is not regarded as in any way directly a conservator of public morals; it does not touch the charitable and benevolent springs of action, like plans for feeding the hungry and clothing the naked; and its educational purpose is yet so little appreciated that it must inevitably be brushed aside by the great majority of those who, either in their public or private capacity, would listen favorably to applications in behalf of schools and colleges."

Justly recognizing the difficulty of creating and sustaining art-museums on any comprehensive scale through the support of private individuals, the Times expresses its hope, by a very definite implication, that the day is coming when the Government will adopt, and public feeling will sustain, the policy of patronizing art by appropriations of money from the public treasury.

Taking the position of so prominent a journal as expressive of a sentiment of very many people in favor of governmental patronage of art, and as in support of our own belief regarding the proper course to be pursued by Government, we venture to hope that the time is near when the subject will find acceptance with Congress and in the community.

6. On entering the principal portal of the Exhibition at Vienna, the eye was almost immediately taken captive by the specimens of porcelain exhibited in the British department. So striking were some of the articles, and so beautiful in their artistic expression, that a feeling of surprise quickly succeeded the delight with which one turned his attention to this feature of English handiwork.

To undertake even a brief description of the exquisite works presented

by Mintons, Wedgwood, Copeland, and the Royal Porcelain Works at Worcester, would carry us far beyond the limits proposed for this paper, and we can only direct attention to the fact that the advances made within a very few years, in the application of art in the manufacture of English pottery, including articles of common use, as well as those designed for ornament alone, have been enormous; the practical result of which has been a great increase of the production and sale of these articles in the competitive markets of the world.

Passing through the British section, one could not fail to notice a similar development of artistic taste in a great variety of manufactures, such as carpets, furniture, lace, decorations for landscape-gardening, including ornamental iron-work, glass ware, jewelry, paper-hangings and tapestries, tiling and mosaics. And, to one who had been present at earlier international exhibitions, the improvement, from an artistic point of view, in all these branches of production that had taken place within comparatively few years, was distinctly evident.

**7. HISTORY OF THE SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM.**—While probably few Americans are aware to what cause this sudden and great advance in the application of the fine arts to industry is attributable, it is well understood in England, and so directly has it resulted from wisely-managed governmental patronage of art, bestowed through the medium of the South Kensington Museum, that some account of the origin and scope of that institution will be appropriate in this connection.\*

The commencement of the collections forming the art-division of the museum dates from the year 1846, when a committee, appointed by the Board of Trade, recommended that a museum should be "formed in connection with the School of Design at Somerset House, which should exhibit to the students of the school, to inquiring manufacturers, artisans, and the public in general, the practical application of the principles of design in the graceful arrangement of forms and the harmonious combination of colors." Some few specimens were procured in accordance with this recommendation.

**8. Numerous objects, illustrating art applied to industry, collected from the Exhibition of 1851, were purchased with a parliamentary grant of £5,000 made to the Board of Trade.**

The specimens thus obtained consisted of examples of furniture, metal-work, pottery, and woven fabrics, and were selected by a committee, who, in forming this collection, looked to its becoming the nucleus of a museum of ornamental manufactures.

In 1852, the Department of Practical Art of the Board of Trade was constituted, and the collection already made was publicly exhibited in the rooms of Marlborough House, and in that year the Bandinel collection of pottery and porcelain was acquired.

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\* We desire to express our indebtedness to Mr. Philip Cunliffe Owen, secretary of the British Commission at the Vienna Exhibition, for his valuable assistance in procuring information as to the history and work of the South Kensington Museum.

In 1854, Parliament made a vote for purchases. Upward of £8,583 was expended by the Department of Science and Art under the authority of the Board of Trade, principally in the purchase of specimens of pottery and porcelain, majolica ware, glass and metal work.

The Gherardine collection of models for sculptures was bought the same year by the chancellor of the exchequer at a cost of £2,110, and placed in the Art Museum.

In 1855, £3,500 were expended in purchases from the Paris Exhibition. The Soulages collection, which was especially rich in majolica ware and specimens of Italian furniture, was brought to England by means of a guarantee-fund, headed by the Prince Consort, in 1856, and finally deposited in the museum.

In the year 1857, the department was transferred from the board of trade to the committee of council on education, and shortly afterward the museum and offices were moved from Marlborough House to South Kensington.

In 1859, numerous objects were purchased in Italy.

In 1860, the Gagli portion of the collection made by the Marquis Campana, consisting of examples of Italian sculpture, was purchased for the sum of £6,000.

In 1861, the sale of the Soltikoff collection took place in Paris, and upward of £5,982 were expended in the purchase of objects from that collection. Other additions were also made in that year.

9. The International Exhibition of 1862 offered opportunities for acquiring specimens of modern art-manufacture, British and foreign, and objects were thus obtained, which cost, in the aggregate, £3,947.

The Paris Universal Exhibition of 1867 afforded further facilities for purchases illustrative of modern scientific discoveries and inventions, and the application of art to manufactures, and a select committee was accordingly appointed by the House of Commons to consider and report on the advisability of making purchases from that exhibition.

After examining various authorities on the subject, the committee reported it was desirable to acquire such objects as those above referred to, at a cost not exceeding £25,000, and to exhibit them in the South Kensington Museum; and, on the report of the committee, the treasury sanctioned an expenditure not exceeding £15,000. A special commission accordingly proceeded to Paris to make selections.

Such have been the principal sources from which the collections of art applied to industry have been formed. In addition, numerous other purchases have been made by means of annual votes of Parliament.

10. The museum has been further enriched by many gifts, notably by the collection of pictures presented by Mr. Sheepshanks, consisting of oil-paintings, water-color paintings, etchings, and drawings. The approximate value of this gift at the time when it was made was £60,000; its present value is not less than £90,000. In addition to many gifts from private individuals, exceeding in the aggregate the value of

£10,000, objects have been presented to the art-division of the museum by Her Majesty the Queen, His Royal Highness the late Prince Consort, His Royal Highness the Crown-Prince of Prussia, His Imperial Majesty the Emperor of the French, His Imperial Majesty the Emperor of Russia, His Highness the Khedive of Egypt, His Imperial Highness the Prince Napoleon, and by various foreign governments.

11. The working-plan of this institution now includes, besides the great central national museum at London, easily accessible to every one visiting or residing in the capital, a system of giving assistance to local schools of art and provincial museums, by loans or gifts of special collections adapted to advance the interests of the manufactures of the particular localities to which they are sent. As for instance, when the remarkable collection of Italian jewelry exhibited by Castellani, at the Paris Exhibition of 1867, was secured by the museum, it was found that most of the articles were in pairs, such as ear-rings, bracelets, &c. Hence it was possible to divide the collection into two parts; one to be retained at London, and the other sent to the schools of art at Birmingham, the seat of the jewelry-trade. And the result soon showed that the suggestive character of the designs and workmanship had proved of great value.

But the museum does not limit itself to the use of duplicates which may happen to come into its hands in its work of distribution to local institutions. The processes of photography, etching, and chromolithography are resorted to for the production of copies that may nearly approach their originals in value as models; and electrotypes, fictile ivories, (consisting of plaster of Paris saturated with wax,) and plaster casts are largely used in the preparation of copies of objects which cannot be duplicated.

Specimens thus produced are available, not only for local institutions in Great Britain, but also for exchange with foreign governments and museums; and a convention was entered into by the representatives of various countries, at the Paris Exhibition of 1867, to promote these exchanges, obtaining permission to reproduce fine works, &c.

The museum is the patron of pure art, as well as the fine arts as applied to manufactures, and, with its splendid galleries, constantly augmenting collections of paintings and statuary, its schools of art and design, and its assistance of local institutions in this feature of its work, is affording an art-education to the people of Great Britain, the practical value and refining influence of which can hardly be too highly estimated.

12. COLLECTIONS BY OTHER GOVERNMENTS.—It would be interesting to trace the action of other European governments than that of Great Britain in regard to the matter we are discussing; for, while none have adopted a policy so well adapted to promote practical ends as that developed in the workings of the South Kensington Museum, the patronage of art and the liberal support of public museums have long been acknowledged as a duty by the governments of the Old World.

But such a relation, while it might not be inappropriate in this connection, would expand unnecessarily a paper that is intended to be suggestive rather than exhaustive.

The simple fact, familiar to all who have visited Europe, may, however, be noted, that scarcely a city is without its art-museum, while the wealth of art-treasures in the great capitals can hardly be conceived of by an untraveled person.

13. That the importance of the culture resulting from the presence of such collections in a community should not be appreciated by the people of America at large is not to be wondered at.

We have not yet shaken off the effects of the engrossment of our forefathers in the material interests of life, necessarily given the foremost place by colonists and pioneers.

Nothing that can be called a prevailing taste in the fine arts can be said to exist in America. All is unformed and undeveloped, depending on the effect of what may be termed hap-hazard influence or accidental local instruction.

And while contemplating this state of things in our own country, we can by no means find in any single European nation a condition of affairs that may be unqualifiedly commended.

14. In many of the centers of art, false and immoral standards, that have been working harm for centuries, exist side by side with what is true and ennobling; for the licentiousness of princes and rulers has not spared art from its baleful pollntions.

Scarcely an art-gallery of any importance can be visited in Europe wherein will not be found some picture or statue shamelessly immoral and indecent in all its suggestions, if not in its actual delineations, which holds its place because of the genius of its author and the beauty of its execution, daily giving forth its degrading lessons, and poisoning the work of those who accept it as a model, an inspiration, or as a suitable object for a copy.

And if the taste in art in America is to be formed by dealers in pictures and statuary, or ignorant millionaires, who make high mechanical excellence the cloak for a traffic evidently in violation of the spirit of the Indeeent-Publication Acts, but few years will be necessary to fasten upon us one of the worst of the many evils of European civilization.

15. But not only in its moral aspect is the question of forming correct standards of taste in the community an important one. In a commercial point of view, it is of the greatest moment.

There is a certain inborn sense of the beautiful in man, which enables him to perceive and appreciate, while it does not impart any creative power. As civilization spreads its influences more and more in the world, and man rises above the level of merely supplying his simpler wants, articles of luxury, as they are called, will occupy places of constantly growing importance in the international centers of trade, as it is evident that the nation which can produce such as shall be richest in the expression of beauty will take precedence of the others.

A noteworthy incident occurred at Vienna in connection with the Japanese department of the exhibition, that may serve to illustrate this point.

A large collection of porcelain vases formed a prominent feature in this department. Those from Japan were seized with avidity by purchasers, and greatly preferred to such as were presented from China, although the latter were similar in general style and material. And it was not difficult to account for the greater popularity of the Japanese work over that from the sister empire.

The pottery of Japan is made to assume graceful shapes, and is decorated in a style not in discord with the cultivated taste of Europe; while that of China is grotesque in form, and is embellished with designs that are only to be admired for their transcendent ugliness.

16. A few years ago, France held an undisputed position as above all other nations in productions which involved the fine arts; but, at the present time, England, Germany, and Italy are closely pressing their Gallic neighbor in this respect, and in several branches have already surpassed her.

And it must be owned that in this great and growing interest of international commerce, the United States have hardly yet made a beginning; entering the world's marts as a lavish purchaser only, where she might readily present herself as a respectable competitor.

We will assume as admitted that to prepare the people of any country for sharing in this international trade in articles involving tasteful designs, a general refinement of taste in the fine arts is necessary. Workmen must be capable of appreciating the designs they are called upon to execute, of improving upon them, and of suggesting new subjects and methods of treatment. Artists must be educated and furnished with food for artistic digestion. The public must be so taught as to be able to take an interest in the productions that are to become a source of national wealth and importance.

17. To accomplish all this, museums which shall contain specimens of the art of other lands and other ages may be said to be indispensable. And such institutions cannot exist in a form that shall render them practically effective without governmental patronage.

18. But patronage must not be confounded with support. Art does not need to be *supported* by government in a country where education is so general and wealth so distributed as in the United States.

And yet the very fact of the general dissemination of wealth creates a need for *patronage* on a larger scale than can be expected from individuals, in order to secure for the public the benefits of aggregations of works of art. And it is here that government, especially the Federal Government, has an important duty to perform. We use the word *duty* advisedly; for, unless the Federal Government comes forward as a purchaser of valuable art-productions, golden opportunities, such as have been embraced by the governments of other countries, and notably by

that of Great Britain, will pass neglected, and the people of America will be left culpably and pitifully behind those of Europe in an interest of constantly growing importance.

19. While it would, perhaps, be out of place in this paper to attempt to propose any definite plan of operations to be pursued by Congress in the premises, a few general suggestions may not be inappropriate.

Probably one of the first reflections, that would occur to the minds of members of Congress in this connection, would be that the adoption of some definite policy in regard to patronage of art would relieve them from many embarrassments.

As has been stated already, the Government will unquestionably be forced in the future, to a greater extent even than in the past, to become the patron of art. And if the present method is continued, Members will often be led to sanction, from considerations of policy, what their taste and judgment would naturally condemn. Whereas, if all questions involving expenditures for art-purposes were submitted to, and controlled by, some commission or association that could be safely trusted with them, Congress would be relieved, and the public interests advanced.

We are not prepared to say that some existing institution may not be found suitable to be made the conservator of this important interest. But if none should appear, a commission might be appointed, non-political in its composition, and serving without compensation, in whose hands might be placed such sums as Congress might deem proper to be expended in this direction.

The purchases made by such a commission would inevitably form a nucleus, around which would gather many private collections, and in whose responsible hands individuals would, by will or otherwise, place valuable works of art. Money, too, would be likely to flow in from private sources, and the work would within a few years attain proportions, that might raise it above the necessity of governmental assistance.

No claim of originality is made for the suggestion of the establishment of such an institution at the national capital. It has been a dream of American artists and art-patrons for years, which only needs the placing of well-considered power in wise hands to become an established fact.

We will not say that in America an attempt should be made to copy the South Kensington Museum. The dissimilar conditions of the people of Great Britain and of the United States as to general education and culture would naturally suggest plans of procedure differing in the respective countries.

20. But the marvelous success of this great monument to the wise policy of government, seconded by liberal and judicious private effort, deserves the careful study of such as are interested in the advancement of art in America.

The visitor at South Kensington finds it difficult to believe that the immense assemblage of art-treasures which delight his enchained atten-

tion at every turn has been effected within twenty-five years, and by the expenditure of really insignificant sums on the part of the government. But the fact remains, and reads a pregnant lesson to Americans.

That we could rival the work of the mother country in the same time is not to be expected. But we venture the opinion that the results of an equal number of years of effort, and a corresponding expenditure of money, directed by the many able heads and hands interested in the cultivation of art in America, would delight and astonish the country, and would certainly surpass the expectations of most persons who are accustomed to sneer at the achievements of Americans in matters pertaining to art.

If such a museum must necessarily lack the finest originals of the great works of past centuries, it might, for a very reasonable expenditure, secure faithful copies of the masterpieces of ancient and mediaeval art; taking advantage of opportunities to acquire such originals as might be made available through sales or bequests of private collections; while the world's markets of works of living artists would be as accessible to it as to similar institutions in older countries.

In the wide field of art as applied to industry, the establishment of relations with existing museums in foreign countries would, through the system of exchanges now existing in Europe, yield many valuable duplicates and copies of ancient works; and a moderate expenditure of money would secure examples of the best contemporary productions in those countries where this application of art has become a specialty.

21. It is not necessary to pursue further, in this paper, the *modus operandi* of such an institution as we are proposing; it may, however, be suggested that the approaching International Exhibition in Philadelphia in 1876 would afford an opportunity for the purchase of many objects suitable to the forming of art-collections. And the occasion—the completion of the first century of our existence as a nation—would surely be fitting for the inauguration of a distinct policy on the part of the Government in this regard.

It may seem somewhat unpatriotic to speak in this connection of the decadence of our nation, when she seems, in the eyes of the world and of her own people, to be in the very spring-time of life. But we know that as with individuals, so with nations, seeds of constitutional decay may be sown in youth, to bear fatal fruit in middle life. And if we are to be instructed by the course of nations whose civilization exists only as a matter of history, we cannot blind our eyes to the truth that the perversion of the mission of art may be made a cause of rapid national decay. Where art becomes a pander to sensual luxury, morals are weakened and the vital forces of the nation are undermined.

The stern virtues of patriotism and self-denying charity; the patient pursuit of science in the interest of the multitude; the elevation of the mind and its achievements over the senses and their gratification: all these give way before the insidious attacks of art devoted to the por-

trayal of the lower pleasures and degraded to the office of exciting the lower passions.

The fact that in no country or age has art been free from these perverted tendencies, so far from disheartening those who would preserve it from them, as far as possible in America, should serve as a spur and a warning.

We believe every reasonable mind will perceive how important an influence for good might be exerted by a national art-commission, controlling a national museum, with local branches and correspondencies, in which should be exhibited pure and elevating studies and models, and from which should be excluded all that is meretricious and demoralizing.

We commend the subject to the consideration of Congress and its vast constituencies, renewing the expression of our regret that no part of the liberal appropriation for enabling "the people of the United States to participate in the advantages of the exhibition at Vienna" could be used in the purchase of a portion, at least, of the rich art-treasures there exhibited ; and expressing the hope that no such opportunity in the future will be neglected by the Government.



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